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**THOU SHALT NOT KILL:
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION AND THE DECALOGUE**

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Abstract

As supporters of the First Amendment, military chaplains have the distinct privilege of tending to the garden of the soul of America's military personnel and their families. Consequently, chaplains oftentimes encounter people who hold convictions against the use of force. These individuals are commonly referred to as conscientious objectors (CO). Chaplains interview applicants for CO status, and although they do not make any recommendation, chaplains do submit a report chronicling their conclusions. This essay explores the Decalogue, specifically the sixth commandment, in order to ascertain if the imperative, "Thou shalt not kill," can serve as a reasonable foundation for the "firm, fixed and sincere belief" of the CO.

Qualitative research served as the primary investigative method for this essay. The researcher exegetically examined the sixth commandment in its grammatical and historical context, as well as properly interpreted and practically applied the command to contemporary society. The research yielded the following conclusion, namely the sixth commandment does not forbid *all* killing. In fact, the Hebrew term, *râtsach*, is never used in contexts of war. Moreover, the sixth commandment was issued to Israel as the nation was on its God-appointed mission of conquest from Egypt to Canaan. Based upon an exegetical analysis of the sixth command in its grammatical and historical context, it appears clear to this researcher that the sixth commandment *cannot* serve as a proof-text for the CO.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION AND THE DECALOGUE

Introduction

As supporters of the First Amendment, military chaplains have the distinct privilege of tending to the garden of the soul of America's military personnel and their families. Spiritual gardening involves the three core processes of the United States Air Force (USAF) Chaplain Corps, which include: conducting religious observances, providing pastoral care, and modeling ethical leadership. Religious observances provide military members and their families the opportunity to worship God corporately. Pastoral care involves counseling, as well as a host of programs for married couples, singles, youth, and children. Additionally, pastoral care includes suicide prevention ministry, critical incident stress management counseling, and interviewing conscientious objectors. Modeling ethical leadership cultivates a moral climate within the military milieu and facilitates decision-making based not only on what is legal, but what is right.

While tending to the soul of American Airmen, chaplains oftentimes encounter individuals who hold convictions against the use of force. These individuals are commonly referred to as conscientious objectors. As discussed in the text, *The Military Commander and the Law*, “a conscientious objector (CO) is a person who is opposed to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms, by virtue of a firm, fixed and sincere belief as a result of religious training or similar belief system” (emphasis in original).¹ Chaplains interview applicants for CO status “to determine sincerity and depth of conviction against war.”² While chaplains do not make any recommendation, they do submit a report chronicling their conclusions. The central purpose of

this essay, therefore, is to explore the Ten Commandments, specifically the sixth command, in order to ascertain if the imperative, “Thou shalt not kill,” can serve as a reasonable foundation for the “firm, fixed and sincere belief” of the CO.

The Distinctive Nature of Biblical Law

Biblical laws have been classified according to content and form. Regarding content, the laws of the Bible are broken down in three parts: the moral law, normally understood as the Ten Commandments, which contains eternal principles applicable for all human beings; the civil law, also called the judgments, which deals with the legal system of the nation of Israel; and the ceremonial law, sometimes referred to as the ordinances, which governs Israel’s religious life, namely their festivals, priestly functions, and sacrificial system. Regarding form, the laws of the Bible are viewed as either apodictic or casuistic. Commands that begin with “do” or “do not” are called apodictic laws.³ These laws are declarative and categorical, and tend to be more religious in nature.⁴ Furthermore, apodictic laws express general principles.⁵ Casuistic laws, also known as case-by-case laws, are “applications of apodictic law, and often express means of identifying and rectifying specific violations of apodictic law.”⁶ Said differently, casuistic laws provide examples of what may happen and what should take place if it does happen.⁷ In other words, “If A takes place, then B will be the consequences.”⁸ According to Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, “It is usually recognized that case laws in the Old Testament are often not pertinent to the present cultural situation, and even if they appear to be pertinent, case laws first require an extrapolation of the principle(s) lying behind them.”⁹

Biblical laws are not exhaustive, but rather paradigmatic in their nature. The laws of the Bible “serve as patterns that govern behavior by means of the implications contained within those patterns of meaning.”¹⁰ Biblical laws provide “a standard by an example rather than by

mentioning every possible circumstance.”¹¹ Therefore, the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,”¹² contains numerous implications concerning anger and attitude even though these things are not explicitly mentioned in the command itself.

The Unique Qualities of the Decalogue

The Ten Commandments are oftentimes referred to as the Decalogue, from the Greek words δέκα (deka) and λόγος (logos), meaning “ten words.” The Ten Commandments are found in a large section of the Bible known as the “Law.” The Law, which can denote the complete Old Testament,¹³ primarily refers to the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books are also known as the Pentateuch. Although much of the material contained in these five books consists of narrative, there are over 600 laws mentioned. In his exceptional work entitled, *Bible Explorer’s Guide*, John Phillips identifies 613 laws, containing 365 negative precepts, one for each day of the year and 248 positive commands, one for each bone in the body.¹⁴

The Decalogue, as apodictic law, is both concise and categorical. It is concise for in the King James vernacular, the Decalogue contains only 326 words.¹⁵ It is categorical in that the Decalogue deals with the whole of relationships, one’s vertical relationship with God and one’s horizontal relationship with fellow human beings. Elton Trueblood, in his book, *Foundations for Reconstruction*, cites the Decalogue in verse:

Above all else love God alone; Bow down to neither wood nor stone. God’s name refuse to take in vain; The Sabbath rest with care maintain. Respect your parents all your days; Hold sacred human life always. Be loyal to your chosen mate; Steal nothing, neither small nor great. Report, with truth, your neighbor’s deed; And rid your mind of selfish greed.¹⁶

In the simplest of statements, the Decalogue contains wisdom for daily living. William Barclay, popular Scottish interpreter, originally entitled his treatment of the Ten

Commandments, “The Plain Man’s Guide to Ethics.”¹⁷ However, since the Ten Commandments are termed commandments, not suggestions, some people may perceive them as limitations on daily living, rather than wisdom for daily living. J. I. Packer clarifies the matter with the following insight:

Because Scripture calls God’s Ten Commandments “law” we assume they are like the law of the land . . . restricting personal freedom for the sake of public order. But that comparison is wrong! *Torah* (Hebrew for “law”) means the sort of instruction a good parent gives his child. Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20 actually use “*torah*” for parental teaching.¹⁸

Packer notes the pedagogical nature of the Ten Commandments through the use of the word *torah*. The intent of the Decalogue, therefore, is not to “restrict personal freedom,” but to guide people into ways that are best for them by providing examples rather than an exhaustive list.

The Ten Commandments outline in the simplest of terms one’s responsibilities toward God, as well as one’s responsibilities toward fellow human beings. Barclay observes:

It may be said that this code inculcates two basic things—it demands *reverence for God* and *respect for man*. The majesty of God and the rights of human personality are alike conserved. This is intensely significant, for it is of the very essence of Judaism and of the very essence of Christianity, that both have a two-directional look. They look both to God and to man. They recognize a duty to God and to man. They both know that a man must love God with every part and fiber of his being, and that he must also love his neighbor as himself. No man dare say that he loves God, unless he also loves his fellowman; and no man can really and truly love his fellowman, unless he sees that the true value of a man lies in the fact that he is a child of God. Without the manward look religion can become a remote and detached mysticism in which a man is concerned with his own soul and his own vision of God and nothing more. Without the Godward look a society can become a place in which, as in a totalitarian state, men are looked on as things and not as persons. Reverence for God and respect for man can never be separated from each other.¹⁹

Barclay’s observation reflects the Great Commandment in the New Testament, which condenses the Decalogue, as well as the entirety of the Mosaic Law, to two primary responsibilities.²⁰ The Bible says:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one

Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.²¹

Indeed, the Great Commandment encapsulates the Mosaic Law: love God and love others.

The two responsibilities are not sequential. J. Grant Howard, in his excellent book entitled *Balancing Life's Demands*, writes, "It is not love for God for a certain amount of time and to a certain degree and *then* love my neighbor. It is love for God *and* love my neighbor. Do them both. Do them both now. Do them both all the time."²² Spiritual warriors are responsible to love God while simultaneously loving their neighbors. Both responsibilities highlight concurrent relationships. The Great Commandment highlights love for God and love for one's neighbor. Love for God is vertical; love for neighbor is horizontal. Thus, the Great Commandment provides a summary of the two tables given to Moses and teaches the importance of right relationships with God and with others.

In sum, the Decalogue, like the Great Commandment,²³ can be summarized as loving God completely *and* loving others considerably.²⁴ Packer adds the following instructive comments:

Note that Jesus' twofold law of love, summarizing the Commandments, comes from Moses' own God-taught elaboration of them . . . "Love your God" is from Deuteronomy 6:5, "love your neighbor" from Leviticus 19:18. It cannot be stressed too much that Old Testament moral teaching . . . is not inferior to that of the New Testament, let alone the conventional standards of our time. The barbarities of lawless sex, violence, and exploitation, cutthroat business methods, class warfare, disregard for one's family, and the like are sanctioned only by our modern secular society. The supposedly primitive Old Testament, and the 3,000-year-old Commandments in particular, are bulwarks against all these things.²⁵

As the Decalogue unfolds one's duty toward God and one's duty toward fellow human beings, it safeguards the individual, as well as society at large. The Decalogue protects the

individual by teaching the person how to live. The Ten Commandments commence with grace, not law. God reminded the nation of Israel of the good news of their deliverance prior to the commands being given. The Bible says, “And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”²⁶ In the words of the Dutch theologian, Jochem Douma, “The commandments follow the gospel of undeserved deliverance.”²⁷ Following God’s gracious deliverance, the Israelites were to live for the glory of God. Philip Ryken adds, “The relationship between law and gospel in the exodus sets the pattern for . . . one purpose of the law in the Christian life: The law teaches God’s redeemed people how to live.”²⁸ The Decalogue also safeguards society at large. Ryken explains: God uses his law to restrain sin in human society . . . The law does not keep people from sinning entirely, of course, because it cannot change our sinful nature. But to a certain extent the law does serve to restrain our sin. God intended his law to have this restraining effect on Israel . . . The law was partly a deterrent. It had the preventive purpose of keeping God’s people away from sin . . . The law continues to have this restraining effect today, which is why many Christians are in favor of posting the Ten Commandments in the classroom and the courtroom.²⁹

A Contextual Analysis of the Decalogue

The Ten Commandments or the Decalogue form the heart and soul of the Mosaic Law, representing a covenantal relationship between God and the children of Israel.³⁰ Originating from God and given to the nation of Israel through God’s servant Moses at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments functioned as the code of conduct for the Israelite nation.³¹ In a manner analogous to the military Code of Conduct, which provides guidance to military members during times of combat or captivity, the Decalogue reflects God’s Code of Conduct, a ten-article code that provides moral principles for the daily conduct of all spiritual warriors, especially during times of spiritual battle.

Although a specific date for the giving of the Mosaic Law is ambivalent, “the commandments may be dated provisionally in the early part of the thirteenth century B.C.”³² John Sampey adds, “The promulgation of the Ten Commandments stands out as the most notable event in all the wilderness sojourn of Israel. There was no greater day in history before the coming of the Son of God into the world.”³³ Sampey links the historic transmission of the Decalogue with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

In keeping with Sampey’s comparison of the Word becoming flesh,³⁴ the mind of God became visible in the tablets of stone, for the Ten Commandments revealed the mind of God to humanity. David Dorsey explains, “A law reflects the mind, the personality, the priorities, the values, the likes and dislikes of the lawgiver.”³⁵ Likewise, the Mosaic Law, and in particular the Decalogue, manifests the mind and will of God.

Upon receiving the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel became afraid.³⁶ God’s mighty words and thunderous deeds were overwhelming. Moses responded to the fearful Israelites by saying, “Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”³⁷ In other words, the Decalogue, as originally given to the Israelites, promoted an authentic love for God, which in turn triggered a vehement contempt for sin. J. Vernon McGee agrees. He asserts, “The law was given to reveal who God is and to throw light upon the vast gap and yawning chasm between God and man.”³⁸ In fact, the Apostle Paul, in penning his epistle to the believers in Rome, writes:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the *knowledge* of sin.³⁹

Sin, therefore, is realized through the law, a standard of measurement. In commenting on the word ἐπίγνωσις (*epignōsis*), which is translated “knowledge,” Richard Lenski offers the following insight:

It is more than “knowledge” (our versions) which may be merely intellectual; it is “full realization” borne in upon us, personal inner conviction. There is much false γνώσις [knowledge] but no false ἐπίγνωσις [full knowledge]. Paul’s statement is axiomatic: sin misses the mark set by the law, hence law reveals what sin does and so makes us realize what sin is.⁴⁰

Later, Paul adds:

But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.⁴¹

Here, the Apostle Paul once again articulates the intent of the law. Paul explained that the tenth commandment was instrumental in his own realization of the sin of coveting. Commentator and theologian F. Leroy Forlines makes the relation of law and sin very plain when he states, “When fallen man stands beside the law, he becomes painfully aware of his sin.”⁴² Indeed, whenever one reads the Ten Commandments, he gets a glimpse into the character of God, and as he does, he sees himself in light of God’s perfect holiness. Consequently, he sees himself and the world around him as utterly sinful. In the words of Martin Luther, “The true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God.”⁴³

The law exposes the sinfulness of humanity, in order to lead sinful humanity to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. In penning his epistle to the churches in Galatia, Paul declares, “Wherefore the law was our *schoolmaster* to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a *schoolmaster*.”⁴⁴ The Greek word translated “schoolmaster” twice in this text is παιδαγωγός (*paidagogos*). There is no English

equivalent for this term that can convey its real force, for there is no exact counterpart in an English home.⁴⁵ Lenski explains:

This term is literally, “boy’s leader” and refers to the attendant, generally a slave, whom a wealthy Greek or Roman father provided for his son during the years between seven and seventeen, whose duty it was to attend and to watch over the lad. He took the boy to school and to gymnastic exercises, watched and corrected his deportment so that it might befit his station, and kept him from hurtful associations and influences, from foolish and hurtful actions. The lad was thus trained early and long ever to be a gentleman . . . This “boy’s guide” was not the boy’s teacher except as indicated; nor was he appointed to administer punishment, for the father attended to the latter.⁴⁶

Like the *παιδαγωγός* (*paidagogos*), the law is both instructive and temporary. It is instructive, for it reveals both the mind and the ways of God, as well as the sinfulness of humanity.

Moreover, according to Galatians 3:24-25, the law, like the *παιδαγωγός* (*paidagogos*) who led the child to and from school, was put in charge to lead people to Jesus Christ, so that they could be made right with God through faith.

The law is also temporary. The child did not remain under the care of the *παιδαγωγός* (*paidagogos*) forever. Once the child reached maturity, he was released from the care of the *παιδαγωγός* (*paidagogos*).⁴⁷ “In like manner, the *law* was the grammar of theology, which, after carrying its scholars a short way, handed them over to *faith* to be completed.”⁴⁸ Biblical commentator, Thomas Marberry, explains:

According to Paul, the purpose of the law was to bring people “unto Christ.” The law was not an end in itself. When the law had brought the Galatians to Christ, it had done its job. The implication is that a mature relationship with God must be based on Christ, not on the law. A relationship based on the law is of necessity immature. For the Christian today, the law serves an important purpose. It demonstrates our unrighteousness and our need for salvation. The law cannot, however, serve as the basis for a relationship with God. Only Christ can do that.⁴⁹

The Ten Commandments resemble a mirror. Like a mirror, the Decalogue reveals what is wrong with the human race. As the Ten Commandments are read and understood, one gets a glimpse into the holy character of God, as well as the total depravity of humanity. The mirror

cannot make right anything that is wrong; it simply reveals what is wrong. Likewise, the Ten Commandments cannot make right what is wrong.⁵⁰ The Ten Commandments simply reveal what is wrong, namely the sinfulness of humanity.⁵¹

Now, located directly under the mirror, in most lavatories, is a sink, which is used for cleansing and washing. Like the *παιδαγωγός* (*paidagogos*) leading a child to school, the Decalogue leads the sinful individual to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that his sins can be cleansed and washed away. Moreover, according to the Word of God, there remains only one way to wash away sin, namely faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁵² Indeed, the atoning death of Jesus Christ is the divine sink, which makes possible the remission of one's sins.⁵³ Therefore, a right relationship with God is made possible only through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus.⁵⁴ Obedience to the law does not make one right with God. Obedience is simply the outward manifestation of the inward transformation wrought by faith in Jesus Christ.

When properly understood as safeguarding both society at large and the individual, heart-felt obedience to the Ten Commandments becomes a reflection of genuine love for God and others. Pastor Paul Chappell observes, "When keeping God's commands becomes an expression of our love for God, we find that each challenge we face becomes an opportunity for God to display the greatness of His power through us."⁵⁵

An Exegetical Exposition of the Sixth Commandment

The sixth commandment is an apodictic law, a law that declares a universal truth. The common truth stated by the sixth commandment is, "Human life is sacred." Packer explains:

Human life is thus the most precious and sacred thing in the world, and to end it, or direct its ending, is God's prerogative alone. We honor God by respecting His image in each other, which means consistently preserving life and furthering each other's welfare in all possible ways.⁵⁶

Human life is sacred for life originates from God. Moses wrote in the Book of Genesis, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”⁵⁷ Life originates from the very breath of God. It is, therefore, a gift from God.

When the Apostle Paul addressed the Athenians on Mars’ Hill, he stated, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.”⁵⁸ Since life is a gift from God who is holy, life itself is deemed holy. Moreover, life is sacred, because human beings are created in the image of God. The Word of God reads:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.⁵⁹

According to Scripture, human beings are fashioned and patterned after God. In other words, mankind was created with cognition, emotion, and volition. Human beings can reason, feel, and choose. As a result, human beings are morally responsible and therefore, accountable to God in whose image they are fashioned.

Old Testament Foundation

The sixth command as stated in Exodus 20:13 reads, “Thou shalt not kill.” Unlike the first five commandments, the sixth commandment, along with the following three commandments, is extremely terse. In fact, the sixth command contains only two Hebrew words, לֹא רָצַח (lō' *tirātsach*), and these two words form an emphatic negative imperative. The Hebrew verb, רָצַח (*rātsach*), is rendered “kill” in the Authorized Version; however, the verb literally means “to dash in pieces.” This verb occurs 49 times in the Old Testament and in every relevant use means

murder, especially with premeditation.⁶⁰ Thus, רַצֵּחַ (*râtsach*) denotes a malicious, premeditated act. Consequently, more recent translations, like the New American Standard Version and the New International Version, render the word “*murder*.” The New English Bible is even more explicit in translating רַצֵּחַ (*râtsach*) as “*commit murder*.”

The sixth commandment, therefore, forbids the “taking of another person’s life for personal and selfish gain,”⁶¹ as Cain did when he slew his brother, Abel.⁶² However, the sixth commandment does not mean that *all* killing is wrong. First, רַצֵּחַ (*râtsach*) is never used to refer to the killing animals for food and sacrifices.⁶³ Scripture records that God allowed the killing of animals for food.⁶⁴ God also allowed the slaying of animals for sacrifices.⁶⁵ Consequently, the sixth commandment cannot be used to support the practice of vegetarianism nor can it be used to condone animal cruelty.⁶⁶

Second, רַצֵּחַ (*râtsach*) is not used in the context of proper punishment for a crime.⁶⁷ Alan Cole explains, “Certainly this command was never seen by [the] Hebrews as ruling out the death penalty (Ex. 21:15), although this is usually expressed by a verb corresponding to ‘put to death,’ not by ‘kill.’ Also, there were no pacifists in Old Testament days.”⁶⁸ Following the Genesis Flood, God delegated to human governments the authority to punish those who did evil, especially murderers. For instance, Genesis 9:6 states, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”⁶⁹ God, therefore, sanctioned the use of killing through judicial execution or capital punishment. The God-ordained government is responsible with facilitating good and restraining evil. This responsibility would include evil existing within the nation itself, as well as any evil individual or country that threatens other individuals or countries with evil and wickedness.

Third, the sixth command does not forbid killing to protect one's own life, family, or property. A home owner was authorized to kill an intruder who broke into his home at night. In Exodus 22:2, the Word of God reads, "If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him." Interestingly, however, the killing of an intruder during the daytime was not authorized. The very next verse, Exodus 22:3, reads, "If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution: if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." Enns explains:

The logic behind this law seems to be that if the intruder is identifiable, retributive justice should be left for the proper channels. Perhaps this law is intended to discourage vigilante justice. Moreover, death is not the proper penalty for thievery, at least not according to the law of retribution announced in the previous section. That killing the thief at night is permissible appears to give the victim great liberty to defend his own property, as well as obviating any threat to his own life. This law maintains a victim's rights to self-defense.⁷⁰

Fourth, the sixth commandment does not apply to accidental killings. The Word of God declares:

As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live.⁷¹

Accidental killings, such as the one identified above, must not receive the appellation of "homicide."⁷² In fact, God provided cities of refuge for the protection of those who accidentally killed someone.⁷³

Fifth, רַצֵּחַ (*râtsach*), a common term in the Old Testament, is never used in contexts of war.⁷⁴ Killing during battle is justified, and this truth is substantiated throughout the Word of God.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the sixth commandment was issued to Israel as the nation was on its God-appointed mission of conquest from Egypt to Canaan. Evidently, there is a distinct difference in the nation of Israel's God-appointed mission of conquest and the wicked, premeditated act of murder. Thus, the sixth commandment, as well as Jesus' teachings in the New Testament, should

not be used as proof texts to support pacifism. The reason pacifistic interpretations of Jesus' teachings exist is that the pacifist fails "to distinguish between private and public duties, and duties of a state."⁷⁶ John and Paul Feinberg argue:

As a private individual I may turn the other cheek when unjustly attacked. However, my responsibilities are quite different when I stand in the position of a guardian of a third party as a civil magistrate or parent. Because I am responsible for their lives and welfare, I must resist, even with force, unjust aggression against them. Moreover, loving my neighbor or enemy does not mean I must stand idly by as my child is kidnapped and murdered. I am to use whatever force is necessary to protect his or her life and safety . . . Texts that pacifists typically cite for nonresistance are verses that have to do with private or personal duties, not public duties.⁷⁷

Furthermore, when the Apostle Paul penned his epistle to the Romans, he reminded his hearers of the authority of the state with these words:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.⁷⁸

Paul's words to the Romans serve as a vivid reminder to each spiritual warrior that human governments have been granted authorization to wield the sword. This God-ordained authority permits nations the right to execute capital punishment, as well as to defend the country and to liberate those enslaved by wrongdoers. The Apostle Paul quotes commandments six through ten in Romans 13:9, only five verses after he noted the government's authority to bear the sword.⁷⁹ The government's God-ordained right to use the sword is discussed in the same context as the sixth commandment, yet independent from the sixth commandment. Evidently, Paul viewed the nation's authority to wield the sword as distinct from the malicious, premeditated act of murder. As stated earlier, killing through judicial execution or capital punishment, as well as through the defense of the country is not considered to be murder (μόν; φονέω) in the Word of God.

Sixth, the sixth commandment does not apply to unique situations ordered by God. For instance, a command was issued to Abraham regarding killing his son, Isaac.⁸⁰ “God reserves to Himself the right of disposing of the life of every man according to His own pleasure.”⁸¹

New Testament Interpretation

Jesus repeats the sixth commandment in the Sermon on the Mount.⁸² As Jesus addresses the issue of murder (*φοβεύω*; *phoneuō*), He discusses the malicious, premeditated act, as well as the penalty for the act. However, Jesus expands the command to include the attitudes and emotions that prompt the act of murder.⁸³ Jesus states:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.⁸⁴

The New Living Translation paraphrases Matthew 5:21-22 as follows:

You have heard that the law of Moses says, “Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.” But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.⁸⁵

Again, Jesus broadens the sixth commandment to include the attitude which provokes the act of murder. Specifically, Jesus addresses the subject of sinful anger. Apparently, it is possible to be angry, yet not sin against God. For instance, the Apostle Paul uses a quote from the Psalmist David in his epistle to the Ephesians. Paul writes, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil.”⁸⁶ There is a vast difference between holy anger and sinful anger, namely a difference in focus. Holy anger or righteous indignation is focused upon sin, whereas sinful anger is focused upon the sinner. Jesus’ cleansing of the temple serves as a fine example of righteous indignation.⁸⁷ Jesus was zealous for the house of God.⁸⁸

In Matthew 5:21-22, however, Jesus condemns anger directed toward one's fellow human being. The Apostle John echoes Jesus' condemnation when he writes, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."⁸⁹ Thus, anger is unrighteous and unholy when it is focused on people, yet righteous and holy when focused upon sin.

The clear teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is that all murders (φονεύω; *phoneuō*) proceed from the heart of fallen humanity. Jesus boldly declares, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, *murders* [φόνος; *phonos*], adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."⁹⁰ All murders begin not with acts of violence, but with attitudes of the heart. The malicious, premeditated act of murder (φονεύω; *phoneuō*) is simply the sinful attitude of the heart fleshed out. Thus, the sixth commandment is violated both through outwardly murdering someone and through inwardly hating someone.

Contemporary Application

Having explained the meaning of the Hebrew term רַצֵּחַ (*râtsach*) and of the Greek term φονεύω (*phoneuō*), and having identified what the sixth commandment does not forbid, it is now time to identify the ways in which this command is violated. In other words, it is now time to answer the question, "How does this commandment apply to contemporary society?"

First, the sixth commandment forbids intentional murder. For example, the sixth command forbids homicide, for homicide is the deliberate and intentional taking of another person's life. Although one may escape the *lex talionis*, the retributive justice, of the state, he or she will not escape the judgment of Almighty God.

Genocide, the intentional and planned murder of groups of people, is also a violation of the sixth commandment. The Third Reich's intentional killing of Jews, Pol Pot's killing fields in

Cambodia, and the systematic extermination of African farmers in Darfur serve as examples of the murder forbidden by this commandment.

Suicide, the deliberate and intentional taking of one's own life, is also forbidden by the sixth commandment. Spiritual warriors are commanded not only to love others but to love themselves.⁹¹ Suicide is never prompted by self-love, but rather self-hatred;⁹² therefore, it is Biblically and morally unacceptable. No one has the right to end his or her life, for life itself originates from the very breath of God. Is it possible for a spiritual warrior to commit suicide? Absolutely, it is indeed possible; however, it is never the will of God for that individual. Life is both precious and sacred. Regardless of the terms used,⁹³ the intentional termination of human life, is prohibited by the sixth command.⁹⁴

Infanticide or induced abortion also falls under the category of intentional murder, for it is the deliberate termination of life in the womb.⁹⁵ The following case studies highlight the sacredness of all human life.

Would you consider abortion in any of the following four situations: [First] there's a preacher and wife who are very, very poor. They already have fourteen children, and now she finds out she's pregnant with the fifteenth. They're living in tremendous poverty. Considering their poverty and the excessive world population, would you consider recommending an abortion? [Second] the father is sick with a bad cold, the mother has tuberculosis (TB). They have four children. The first is blind, second is dead, third is deaf, fourth has TB. She finds that she's pregnant again. Given their extreme situation, would you consider recommending an abortion? [Third] a white man has raped a thirteen-year-old black girl, and she became pregnant. If you were her parents, would you consider recommending an abortion? [Fourth] a teenage girl is pregnant. She's not married. Her fiancé is not the father of the baby, and he's concerned. Would you consider recommending an abortion? If you said *yes* to the first case, you just killed John Wesley, one of the great evangelists in the nineteenth century. If you said *yes* to the second case, you killed Ludwig van Beethoven. If you said *yes* to the third case, you killed Ethel Waters, the great black gospel singer who thrilled audiences for many years at Billy Graham Crusades around the world. And, if you said *yes* to the fourth case, you killed Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

In commenting on the subject of abortion, Charles Swindoll, former President of Dallas Theological Seminary, writes:

It has come to the time where the most dangerous place to be in America is not the inner city, where gangs threaten innocent lives, or in angry prisons, where only the fit survive, but in the womb of a mother who is being told that if she doesn't really want the baby, an abortion is the solution.⁹⁷

The Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood, notes this startling statistic: "More than 95 percent of children killed by abortion are killed for reasons of convenience, not incest, not rape, not the physical condition of the unborn, and not the threatened health of the mother."⁹⁸ Does God have any thoughts on this subject of abortion? Does Holy Scripture have anything to say about this moral problem afflicting America? Indeed, God has expressed His thoughts on this subject throughout the pages of the Old and New Testaments.⁹⁹ The Word of God clearly teaches the sacredness of *all* human life from the moment of conception to the grave. Thus, regardless of conversations about life and its dimensions, "including the unborn, the aged, the physically and mentally handicapped, the unattractive, and every other condition in which humanness is expressed from conception to the grave,"¹⁰⁰ one can and must declare the sanctity of *all* human life.

Second, the sixth commandment forbids indirect murder. In other words, the sixth command forbids acts of cruelty and violence. Packer astutely comments:

It is grievous to see how crimes against the person (mugging and bombing, for instance) have increased in supposedly Christian countries, while brainwashing and interrogation by torture (and sometimes torture without interrogation) have established themselves as standard resources of modern militarism. Had the sixth commandment been pondered, none of this would be.¹⁰¹

Packer's observations vividly illustrate the sum of the sixth commandment, namely that acts of cruelty and unjust violence, which deprive humanity of the abundant life that God intends for them to enjoy, breaks the spirit of this apodictic law.

Third, the sixth commandment forbids invisible murder, namely sinful anger. As stated earlier, murder does not begin with the outward act, but with the inward attitude. The Apostle

John boldly declared, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.”¹⁰² In addition, John wrote, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”¹⁰³ Ryken observes, “There is almost always something murderous about our anger.”¹⁰⁴

The sixth commandment forbids murder, whether intentionally through homicide, genocide, suicide, or infanticide; indirectly through cruelty and violence; or invisibly through sinful anger. John Calvin rightly concluded, “The purpose of this commandment is: the Lord has bound mankind together by a certain unity; hence each man ought to concern himself with the safety of all.”¹⁰⁵ The sixth commandment, therefore, highlights love for one’s neighbor by underscoring the sanctity of all human life.

Conclusion

As the Decalogue unfolds one’s duty toward God and one’s duty toward fellow human beings, it safeguards the individual, as well as society at large. The question presented at the beginning of this essay was, “Can the Decalogue, specifically the sixth command, which states “Thou shalt not kill,” serve as a legitimate foundation upon which the house of the CO is built? Based upon an exegetical analysis of the sixth commandment in its grammatical and historical context, as well as the practical application and interpretation of the command, it appears clear to this researcher that the sixth commandment *cannot* serve as a proof-text for the CO.

¹ Kyle W. Green, Ryan D. Oakley, and Christine M. Herrera, eds., *The Military Commander and the Law*, 10th ed. (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: The Judge Advocate General’s School, 2010), 284.

² *Ibid.*, 285.

³ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 171.

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 193.

⁵ Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 214.

⁶ Ibid., 215.

⁷ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 173.

⁸ Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 193.

⁹ McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 215.

¹⁰ Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 193.

¹¹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 171.

¹² Exod 20:13. Unless otherwise noted, the King James Version of Holy Scripture will be used throughout this paper.

¹³ John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 1 Cor 14:21.

¹⁴ John Phillips, *Bible Explorer's Guide: How to Understand and Interpret the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1987), 83.

¹⁵ Exod 20:1-17.

¹⁶ Elton Trueblood, *Foundations for Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 10, quoted in Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 729.

¹⁷ William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

¹⁸ J. I. Packer, *Growing In Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 224.

¹⁹ Barclay, *The Ten Commandments*, 2.

²⁰ Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28.

²¹ Mark 12:28-34.

²² J. Grant Howard, *Balancing Life's Demands: A New Perspective on Priorities*, 2nd ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1994), 45.

²³ Mark 12:28-34.

²⁴ Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28

²⁵ Packer, *Growing In Christ*, 224-225.

²⁶ Exod 20:1-2.

²⁷ Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 4.

²⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Written In Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 29-30.

²⁹ Ibid., 31-32.

³⁰ Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4.

³¹ Exod 20:1.

³² Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology [EDT]* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), s. v. "Ten Commandments, The" by P. C. Craigie, 1074.

³³ James Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia [ISBE]*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), s. v. "Ten Commandments, The," by John Richard Sampey, 4:2944.

³⁴ John 1:14; Gal 4:4-5.

³⁵ David Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (September 1991): 332.

³⁶ Exod 20:18-19.

³⁷ Exod 20:20.

³⁸ J. Vernon McGee, "The Ten Commandments in the Age of Grace," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115 (October 1958): 353.

³⁹ Rom 3:19-20; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 244.

⁴¹ Rom 7:6-7.

⁴² F. Leroy Forlines, *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Romans* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1987), 77.

⁴³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963), 26:309.

⁴⁴ Gal 3:24-25; emphasis added.

⁴⁵ W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 3:173.

⁴⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 181.

⁴⁷ Thomas Marberry, Robert E. Picirilli, and Daryl Ellis, *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Galatians through Colossians* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1988), 58.

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Edinburg: Calvin Translation Society, n.d.; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 21:108 (page references are to reprint edition).

⁴⁹ Marberry, Picirilli, and Ellis, *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Galatians through Colossians*, 58.

⁵⁰ Rom 3:19-20.

⁵¹ Rom 7:6-7.

⁵² Rom 10:8-10, 13.

⁵³ Matt 26:28; Heb 9:22.

⁵⁴ Gal 3:10-4:7.

⁵⁵ Paul Chappell, *Overcoming Life's Greatest Challenges: Applying God's Timeless Ten Commandments to the Struggles of Today* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2009), x.

⁵⁶ Packer, *Growing In Christ*, 259.

⁵⁷ Gen 2:7.

⁵⁸ Acts 17:28a.

⁵⁹ Gen 1:26-28.

⁶⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, "The Doctrine of Capital Punishment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (July 1972): 216. Ryrie adds, "Of the 49 occurrences 36 are in the Pentateuch and Joshua related to laws regarding murder and manslaughter. Of the remaining 13, 2 involve an abstract use in the nominal form (Ps. 42:11; Ezek. 21:22), 2 are quotations of the command (Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2), and the remainder mean murder."

⁶¹ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology [EDT]*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), s. v. "Ten Commandments, The" by P. C. Craigie, 1076.

⁶² Gen 4:1-15; cf. Heb 11:4.

⁶³ Exod 20:24.

⁶⁴ Gen 9:3.

⁶⁵ Gen 4:4.

⁶⁶ Prov 12:10.

⁶⁷ Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 422. Enns adds, "The only exception to this is Num. 35:30, where it refers to punishment for a guilty party."

⁶⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 159.

⁶⁹ Cf. Exod 21:12-17; Lev 24:17; Num 35:30-31.

⁷⁰ Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 449.

⁷¹ Deut 19:5.

⁷² James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), 2:192.

⁷³ Deut 19:1-13; cf. Num 35:6-32.

⁷⁴ Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 422.

⁷⁵ Deut 20:1-19; Jer 5:15-17; Num 33:55-56; Deut 9:4-6; cf. Heb 11:32-34; Rom 13:1-4. For an excellent treatment of Christian attitudes toward war, see John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 345-82.

⁷⁶ John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 356.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Rom 13:1-4.

⁷⁹ The actual order in which Paul lists the final five commandments differs from the order in which the commandments are given in Exod 20:13-17 and Deut 5:17-21. The seventh commandment precedes the sixth commandment in Rom 13:9, while commandments eight through ten remain in their original order.

⁸⁰ Gen 22:1-18.

⁸¹ Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 2:193.

⁸² Matt 5:21-22.

⁸³ Matt 5:22; cf. Matt 15:19.

⁸⁴ Matt 5:21-22.

⁸⁵ *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 961.

⁸⁶ Eph 4:26-27; cf. Ps 4:4.

⁸⁷ Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-17.

⁸⁸ John 2:17.

⁸⁹ 1 John 3:15.

⁹⁰ Matt 15:19; emphasis added.

⁹¹ Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 118-19; cf. Matt 22:39; Eph 5:28-29, 33.

⁹² Matt 27:5; Acts 1:18.

⁹³ I.e. suicide, assisted suicide, voluntary euthanasia, mercy killing, etc.

⁹⁴ For a comprehensive treatment of the historical, legal, ethical, and theological aspects of euthanasia, see Edward J. Larson and Darrel W. Amundsen, *A Different Death: Euthanasia & the Christian Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 9-252.

⁹⁵ For an excellent, Biblical treatment of the subject of abortion, see John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 47-98.

⁹⁶ Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2000), 6-7.

⁹⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, "Why I Stand For Life," *Focus on the Family* (August 1990): 18.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 19. For more information, visit <http://www.guttmacher.org> (accessed February 19, 2011).

⁹⁹ Gen 1:26-27; Ps 139:15-17; Jer 1:5; Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:15.

¹⁰⁰ Carrie Gordon Earl, "Stem Cell Research: Truth vs. Hype," *Focus on the Family* (January 2002): 3. The quotation was adapted from Focus on the Family's Guiding Principle found in the body of Earl's article.

¹⁰¹ Packer, *Growing In Christ*, 260.

¹⁰² 1 John 3:15a.

¹⁰³ 1 John 4:20-21.

¹⁰⁴ Ryken, *Written In Stone*, 147.

¹⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), II.viii.39.

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